WHY I AM A MEMBER

OF THE

MORAVIAN CHURCH,

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I.

THE NEGATIVE REASONS.

1. *Not because I was born of Moravian Parents.*

I was not born in the Moravian Church If I had been, I should doubtless consider this as one of the bonds which unites me to it. It is certainly not an evidence of a decided and intelligent religious faith, to be continually, and on the slightest pretext, changing one's Church relations, one year belonging to this communion, next year to another. Before a man leaves the Church in which he was born, to which his fathers belonged, and in which, if they were true Christians, they felt themselves happy, he should consider well. On the other hand, however, such considerations as birth and descent should never have a deciding voice in a matter which concerns the heart and conscience. These must be free, and every man not only has the right, but it is his duty, if he finds in another denomination a better presentation of the doctrinal truths and the Christian life and activities which he has convinced himself are essential, at least to him, to

unite with such a denomination, though his ancestors have belonged for centuries to the Church he is leaving. That Church is the best for me, individually, which meets *my* special needs in respect to advancement in Christian culture and in Christian life.

2. *Not because I make no account of Denominational Differences.*

I am not a member of the Moravian Church, because I think it is a matter of no consequence whatever to *which* Church one may belong. When a *choice* is given to us, then it is not at all a matter of indifference. It is true, that the different Churches are only so many gardens of the heavenly Master, in which plants are cultivated in various ways for Him, but the soil in the different gardens, the methods of the gardeners, and the species of plants themselves, are very dissimilar. Every man has to a greater or less extent, a peculiar standpoint from which he views spiritual truth, and a preference for certain methods of spiritual culture; and he who is truly in earnest in seeking for truth and for growth in his religious life, will certainly *not* be indifferent as to which of the Churches he attaches himself. This is *only* a matter of indifference to those whose religion is nothing but a form, or who esteem themselves as raised above all the Churches, because they have never tasted the blessings of any one of them, or are incapable of any deep religious feelings and convictions.

3. *Not because of our Beautiful Forms or other External Peculiarities.*

I am *not* a member of the Moravian Church because of the beauties of its ritual, or the many delightful peculiarities of its Church and Congregation life. I *value* these things very highly, and regret very much that we have surrendered so many of them, or have been compelled to surrender them. Some of them might have been retained, at least in principle, though in their external details they might have had to be modified.

I value our venerable episcopate: it is the historic bond that connects us with the Ancient Church of the Bohemian and Moravian confessors.

I admire the comprehensive character of our Church: its form of government embraces the best features of all the systems prevailing elsewhere; it is democratic, and yet it provides for the proper cohesion of all the parts; its system of checks admirably preserves the freedom of the congregations, and yet gives to the elected Executive Board that measure of authority which enables it

to maintain a perfect equality amongst them, and to see that none are neglected.

I admire the ecumenical character of our Church: we have congregations in every quarter of the globe and yet we are organically and spiritually *one*, with the same government, constitution, doctrine, and ritual.

I admire the broadness and elasticity of our whole Church system and idea, which imposes no unnecessary restraints either upon the individual, the congregations, or the Provinces, and yet has guarded against disintegration by providing for uniformity in faith and practice in great essentials.

I value the simplicity in dress, manners and social intercourse, which once prevailed so generally amongst us. I love our designations of each other as "Brother" and "Sister," and that practically fraternal sympathy and spirit which makes us feel at home at once, the world over, when we meet other Moravians.

I admire and love the rich variety of our Church services, our liturgies and singing-meeting, our peculiarly beautiful and impressive celebrations of Christmas, of the Passion Week, of Easter Morning, of New Year's Eve, of the special Memorial Days of our own Church, founded as they are on deep religious feeling and a wonderfully correct liturgical taste. I love our beautiful church-music, our simple and yet expressive celebration of the Lord's Supper, our funeral-service, our well-kept "God's acres." I love our Text-Book, with its daily Scripture watch-words for the Church and its membership throughout the world.

All these things, and many other things in the life and spirit of our Church, which it is not easy to define in brief words, I value highly. But I regard them as belonging, to a greater or less extent, to those externals which do not touch the real essence of our Church principles and spirit, or rather perhaps, which only reach their true meaning when that essence pervades the souls of those who call themselves members of the Moravian Church. It is not for any or all of these things *alone*, that I am a member of the Moravian Church.

II.

THE POSITIVE REASONS.

1. *Because of the History of this Church,—the Grace of God displayed in and through it.*

Why, then, am I a member of the Moravian Church, and why do I love my Church and its membership?

First. Because of its glorious history, because the Lord has manifested Himself so wonderfully to it, and, despite its numerical feebleness, has been pleased to accomplish such great things by it.

Four hundred years ago, [1457] when all Christendom lay bound in the chains of Roman or Greek error and superstition, the Lord Himself called our Church into being in Bohemia and Moravia, as a witness for His truth, and raised up a multitude of faithful confessors who would not bow the knee to Baal. The fathers of that Church, Huss and Jerome of Prague, died a martyr's death, and thousands followed them in this example of suffering and unfaltering devotion to Christ and the truth of His gospel. They were thrown into prison, driven into the forests and caves, exiled, tortured, beheaded, but with their dying breath they testified to their cruel persecutors, that justification and sanctification are alone to be found in the blood of the Crucified Saviour.

Afterwards, when the Protestant Churches were called into being by the great Reformation which Luther inaugurated, they again bore their testimony that not only pure doctrine, but a holy life, sanctified by the merits of Christ, belongs to a complete and genuine Christianity, and Luther gave them the testimony that such a Church as theirs he greatly desired to establish, but he could not command the services of competent men. After an existence of somewhat more than one hundred and fifty years, the united priestly and secular power of Austria succeeded in destroying the work of God, and the Brethren's Church in Bohemia and Moravia was extinguished in blood. In the year 1621 twenty-three noblemen, the most prominent members of the Church, were executed in Prague; many others fell victims to the rage of the priests; thousands left their native country and emigrated to other lands, principally to Poland and Prussia, where they found a new home amongst evangelical Protestants, and, still maintaining their organization as a Unity of Brethren, raised their voices in favor of a spiritual union amongst the established State Churches. Amos Comenius, the last Bishop of the Bohemian line, concluded his history of that Church with these words, "Lord, renew our days as of old."

And this prayer was answered. Not quite one hundred years afterwards, the Lord called Zinzendorf, Spangenberg, Watteville, Boehler and other men to be the instruments for the renewal of the Brethren's Church, whose history and principles had been faithfully preserved amongst some of the descendants of the Ancient Brethren

in Moravia, and whom the Lord led to Herrnhut, where Count Zinzendorf gave them a home, and where a new era in the history of Unitas Fratrum was to begin. Here, and soon at other places in Germany, England, and America, these pious emigrants and tireless witnesses from Moravia united themselves with Christians from many other communions, and covenanted with them to live together and cultivate fellowship in faith and love and Christian living and activity. It was a time of dead orthodoxy on the one hand, or of heartless infidelity on the other, and these companies of earnest believers became centres of attraction for many who longed for a living, Apostolic Christianity. The Lord in many ways manifested His favor to these faithful bands of disciples. On the 13th of August, 1727, that memorable baptism of the Spirit was given to the colony at Herrnhut, by which Lutherans and Reformed, Moravians and schismatics were fused into a living congregation of Jesus, and an overpowering conviction was given to them that the central point of all Christianity is the doctrine that Jesus Christ, the Crucified, is our God and our Brother, is my Saviour and yours, our righteousness, sanctification and redemption. And, by a later and almost equally powerful experience (Sept. 16th, and Nov. 13th, 1741,) they were taught that this same Saviour is the only King, Head and Elder of the Church, and therefore also theirs. To Him they renewed their allegiance, and vowed that henceforth they would call no man leader, but accept and acknowledge Him, and Him alone, as their Guide and Master. The reality of these experiences they manifested in their life and practice. Zinzendorf, the honored Count, surrendered honor, title, fortune, everything he possessed, for the extension of Christ's kingdom. The Bohemians and the Germans, the Brethren in England and America, forsook wife and children, house and farm, in order to proclaim in heathen and Christian lands the grace of the Crucified Saviour. The love of Him was their supreme passion. Every mouth ran over with His praise. Every house was a sanctuary where His name was adored. No land was too cold, no climate too deadly, no seas or mountains or forests too dangerous, no heathen too stupid or degraded, for these humble yet rejoicing and undaunted witnesses of the love of Jesus. They were willing to be sold as slaves for His sake, and many of them fell beneath the treacherous blows of the savage heathen, or pined away in dungeons, or from pestilence and fever, cheerful and thankful to the last.

The controlling spirit and life of the Church which sent out these

messengers, notwithstanding many errors and failures, presents to our view such manifestations of Christ's grace and guidance and of the Holy Spirit's power, that we are justified in believing that the great Head of the Church, in permitting the rise and continued existence of the Renewed Church of the Brethren, has assigned to it a special mission, and means that it shall live. Otherwise we fail to see why it has not long since degenerated into a mere sect, or was not merged into one of the larger denominations. That mission may not be one of great prominence before the world; the work that is specifically ours may be all in the shade,—but that it is a mission for Christ, and a work for Him, is none the less true, and they are none the less truly glorious on that account Read the history of our Church, make clear to yourself what its true life and spirit were, by perusing the biographies of our early brethren, clergy and laity, and you will surely be anew persuaded that you have good reason to rejoice that your lot has been cast in such pleasant places, and that you have a goodly heritage.

2. *Because of its Doctrinal Position.*

But, does this Church offer me anything more than sweet and inspiring historical recollections? Has the Moravian Church retained any special advantages for the sake of which I still cling to her in preference to other Churches? I answer, it has.

When the Brethren received that baptism of the spirit of brotherly love, and they accepted Christ as their only King and Elder, then they set aside all their disputes about special doctrines and the definitions of them, all disagreements as to the binding authority of merely human standards and confessions, which had so nearly sundered their own union, and have in all ages brought so much harm to the Church of Christ. They accepted the Holy Scriptures anew as the only guide of believing and living. What according to the Scriptures and experience is so plain that a child can grasp it:—the doctrine of the natural depravity of man; the doctrine that a full deliverance from the power and penalty of sin can alone be found in the redemption of Jesus, God's well-beloved Son; the doctrine that in Christ we are born again and become God's dear children, through faith, which works by love,—these truths they grasped with all the unquestioning faith of a child,—these they maintained with heroic energy against every attack. For them they lived, and in defence of them they were willing to die. Concerning such mysteries of

Scripture as the Trinity, Election, the Sacraments, the methods of Regeneration, they did not believe it right to set up any definitions which should bind the conscience. The yoke that was too heavy for the fathers they were not willing to lay on the necks of the children. The general history of the Christian Church has shown how views on these special points have differed at different times, and how the strifes of parties and their mutual condemnations of each other have brought only division and death, instead of unity and life. Experience and observation teach us, that there are scarcely two persons to be found who have precisely the same opinions on these points,—how much less can we expect to exact a literal acceptance of the precise definitions of a merely human confession from millions of Christians? Our own individual conclusions may change very considerably at different stages of our life, according as our study of God's word and our spiritual experiences bring us further in Christian knowledge and feeling. The Scriptures do not favor such a contraction of divine truth within human confessions. St. Paul says: "We know in part. . . . . Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known." (1 Cor. 13: 9-12.) "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. . . . Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." (Phil. 3: 8, 15, 16.) "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." (1 Cor. 2: 2.) It has, in accordance with such declarations of the sacred Scriptures, been our effort to cultivate that spirit of teachableness and humility, which regards the whole sum of divine truths as a light which our eyes are yet unable to bear in its complete fullness. Each Church views them as they come to it reflected through the imperfect medium of a man's intelligence; but it were wrong to insist, not only that its own views are the only correct ones, but also that they comprehend all that it is possible for man to know concerning God. Some things are plain, and the plainest are the most important. Let us understand, realize, and practice these first. After that, further progress is surer and safer. Whatever differences of opinion may then arise on other doctrinal points, and however we may go wrong ourselves, or think that others have gone wrong, the all-important

starting-point is secure, and we shall not wander far from Christ, who is "the centre and the circumference" of all saving and sanctifying truth.

Therefore, we so much admire the principle which our own Church adheres to, of magnifying and insisting upon the doctrine of a Crucified Saviour for sinful and helpless man as the supreme truth, but refusing to establish any definitions on minor and disputed points, and then to enforce the acceptance of them on its membership.

The great and manifest *facts* of Revelation, and of the experience of Christians, in every age and of every name, are sufficient to exhaust all our study, to kindle all our zeal, to inspire our utmost efforts in external activity and spiritual attainment; and having them, in our Christian faith and consciousness, we also gain a common ground of sympathy and co-operation with all believers. Therefore, it is in this attitude that the Renewed Church has ever maintained and practically exhibited the position of a true Union-Church, even as the Ancient Bohemian and Moravian Church occupied it in its frequent and eager attempts at a fraternization with God's children of other names, and in its unceasing testimony to the divided Churches of Protestantism, "But one thing is needful." And, flowing from this same practical view and subjective application of the truths concerning Christ the Saviour, and of His finished work for us, is derived another feature in our teaching and the type of Christian character that has been, and still is, so often beautifully illustrated amongst us, which seeks to unite the characteristic spirit, methods, and motives of St Paul and St. John, and thus in some degree to approach the full harmony of the ideal Christian character and life of the New Testament.

[Of course no one will understand that in saying this it is claimed that there are not multitudes of Christians elsewhere who are not making the same effort, and perhaps reaching this end more completely than we. It is only necessary to remind the reader who may have taken alarm at what has been and may yet be said, that we are speaking now of the spirit and aims of our Church as these are manifested in its teachings in the experience of many of its members, and in the *ideal* which it, as a church, upholds. Ideals are a very important matter.]

Our theology gives prominence to the truth that Christ not only died, but that He also lived for us, and that His holy life is meritorious for us, and is our model and encouragement. By the real

human life of the Son of God, the circumstances and experiences of our own life are to be governed and hallowed. The theory of our "class" system rests upon this conception, and in general our whole teaching and testimony seeks to make the Divine Son of Man a living Saviour and Brother, the love of Him the controlling motive and touchstone in religious experience, the serving of Him a matter of every-day experience and practice.

3. *Because of its earnest demand for a Pure Life, as well as a Pure Doctrine.*

From the beginning of its history, our Church has insisted that to be a true Christian, means not only to have pure doctrine, but also to live as a child of God, yea more, that it is of greater importance to have Christ in the heart and to be living a life of faith in and love to Him, than to be irreproachably correct in theoretical belief according to an elaborate confession of faith that has been constructed by man's hand. Hence, our fathers in their effort to establish a pure Church, were unwilling to accept any one as a member who had not the full witness in his heart and in his life that he had been born again of the Holy Spirit. Experience teaches us more and more conclusively that the establishment of such a Church is not possible, that there will ever be tares amongst the wheat until the great harvest-day. Yet it is the true theory of a living congregation of Jesus, and in endeavoring to realize it as far as may be possible, our fathers ever insisted on the necessity of strict church-discipline administered in the spirit of Christ and of His Apostles. Hence, also the encouragement and appliances which they provided for the promotion of fellowship amongst the members of the same congregation, without which there can be no true Christian strength and happiness, and of a general participation of all the members in bearing the burdens and doing the work of the Church. The whole membership, old and young, male and female, were continually reminded of their duty to be co-workers in the great work of advancing Christ's Kingdom, each in his own degree and manner, and to accept their ordinary employments and business as a means of performing a ministry for Christ.

How much closer it is possible to approach to such an ideal Christian society in which love rules supreme, than we now-a-days may be ready to believe, the early history of the Church furnishes many illustrations. That we are not realizing more of it now is only

a symptom of our degeneracy and an appeal to us all to unite in supplicating the Lord that He would renew our days as of old.

III.

OBJECTIONS.

1. But it may perhaps be said, "Much that has been claimed as being special to our Church, is by no means so in fact. Other Churches teach and believe just as we do on these points. They, too, preach Christ Jesus as the great central point of all doctrine; they no longer put so much stress upon their distinctive confessions; lay-activity is far more prevalent amongst them than amongst ourselves, etc."

We answer, this is no doubt true, but a hundred and more years ago it was *not* true of them, and if they have now what we have always had, and the testimony of our Church has not been altogether in vain, let us heartily rejoice and strike hands with them as with brethren. But *this* surely is no reason why we should undervalue our *own* Church. If any one of the other Churches shall prove to have made further advances in the love of Christ, and can offer us better provisions for furthering our Christian culture and activity, then we should be willing to forsake our own Church and unite with it,—but not before.

2. But the objection is made: "Many of your members have no true life in God; some are 'at ease in Zion;' they mistake superficial religious emotions for true spiritual feeling; there is nothing to distinguish your members from those of any other Church."

This is, unhappily, only *too* true. Many walk, we say it with weeping, as the enemies of the cross of Christ. But is this not the case with you also? Where is the congregation which comes up to the New Testament ideal, and is without spot or blemish or any such thing? Besides, let us not judge each other, but rather admonish one another in love.

3. We may be told: "Your Church is very small, you have not advanced, you are far behind other Churches which came into existence long after you." In this there is much truth.

Many mistakes were formerly made in neglecting to use favorable times and circumstances for external growth, and the leaders and members of the Church were often lacking in energy and faith. No doubt we should to-day be a much larger Church if our fathers had

not deliberately adopted the principle of *non*-extension, in the belief that the Church would best fulfill its mission by remaining small. But we should not forget that an increase of membership does not necessarily imply a corresponding growth in genuine spiritual force and influence, and that on the other hand, the amount of spiritual power and of external activity which can be exercised by a small but compact and earnest body of Christians, may go far beyond the measurement which tests these only by the sum total of the membership.

Still, we have not by any means been idle,—and in fact have been much more active than our neighbors often think, though much of this activity, carried on quietly but with much self-sacrifice and persistence for more than a century, has brought us no increase of membership. Our whole communicant membership is only about 16,500 in the home-churches, yet there are not less than 319 missionaries engaged in heathen lands, where our total membership is nearly 70,000. In the German province, through the agency of the "Diaspora" mission, there are at least 100,000 persons in spiritual fellowship with our Church, who, however, do not and are not expected to sever their connection with their own churches. At least five per cent of our whole communicant membership is engaged in the active *official* service of the Church,—that is ONE IN TWENTY. If any one considers figures as the decisive test of fidelity to the Lord in external work, he will doubtless find that there is not a single other Church which even approaches this proportion

In our own country, the growth of our Church has, proportionately, been more rapid during the past ten years than that of the largest of the denominations, and is surpassed, so far as we know, by only one of them, and yet their opportunities for growth are, of course, very much greater, even relatively, than are ours If our Church recognizes the duty of extending its borders,—and it *is* a solemn and imperative duty to make the effort, not in any narrow-hearted sectarian spirit, but for the good of souls and the glory of Christ,—there is certainly every reason why it should be successful.

CONCLUSION.

Surely we have many reasons to be thankful for the privileges and blessings which we have enjoyed, and are enjoying as members of the Moravian Church, and to all who make this acknowledgment, I would, in conclusion, earnestly address the appeal, Let us covenant anew with one another to make a more faithful use

of these privileges and blessings. Let us seek to grow in grace and in knowledge, and give all diligence to make our calling and election sure. Let us manifest our grateful love to the Church and its Head by an untiring activity in the service of the Kingdom of God, within and without our Church. Then the Lord shall say to us: "Thou hast a little strength. But, behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it"